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The Mysterious World of 'The Yowie Man'

by Jim Smith.

Rex Gilroy was the most prolific of Blue Mountains authors. He and his wife Heather published 28 books between 1995 and 2023.[1] These were fairly evenly divided between his four main areas of interest: UFOs and extra-terrestrials, 'Yowies', 'mystery animals' and undocumented ancient civilisations. His 600-page autobiography *Yowie Man: The Life and Times of Rex Gilroy* was completed just before his death. These books, produced at an average rate of one or two titles per year, are distributed through the 'print on demand' service Lulu.com.[2] Five new books, totalling 1283 pages, were published in 2017 alone. In that year Rex and Heather were contacted by the California Church and University Institute, and informed that they had qualified for the award of a Ph.D. in recognition of their research and, in addition, Rex also qualified for the title of Professor of History.

Rex Gilroy holding what he believed was a 'fossilised endocast of a relict hominid skull', found on Narrow Neck. Photo: Jim Smith. Date: 2020.

The Gilroy books totalled the equivalent of over 8100 A4 pages.[3] In addition, Rex wrote hundreds of articles for newspapers and magazines. Rex and Heather also produced a monthly newsletter for subscribers for almost 20 years.

One of Rex's earliest articles turned out to be prophetic. It was written for the December 1968 issue of *Into the Blue*, the magazine of the 'Coast and Mountain Walkers' bushwalking club. Entitled 'The Disappearance of Australian Butterflies', it summarised his observations on the decline of Lepidoptera and beetle populations since he had begun his childhood studies. He attributed this to excessive collecting, use of chemical sprays and overdevelopment. 50 years later, entomologists began to realise that insect population declines had reached catastrophic levels, with some saying we were living through an 'insect apocalypse'.

Rex gave many public lectures and was featured in more than a dozen television programmes. Interested people joined the organisations he started up including The Australian Yowie Research Centre, Australian Unknown Animals Investigation Centre, Australasian Cryptozoological Research Centre, Australian Unexplained Mysteries Research

1 Second editions were produced of two titles, *Mysterious Australia* and *The Yowie Mystery*. The Lions Club also published a 28-page booklet written by Rex in 2014 on spider identification and treatment of spider bites.

2 The first edition of *Mysterious Australia* was published by Nexus magazine.

3 Many anecdotes, photos and lines of evidence were repeated in different titles as their significance was re-evaluated. For the two titles produced in second editions the page count is for the larger of the two.

Group and Blue Mountains UFO Research Club and Underground Base Investigation Network. Rex formed the 'Mt York, Blue Mountains and District Natural History and Wildlife Conservation Society of New South Wales' in 1966.

In his autobiography Rex portrays an idyllic picture of his early life on his parents' farm, surrounded by bushland, at Lansvale beside the Georges River. Here, his interest in nature, particularly the lives of insects and spiders, developed. He wrote: "the Lansvale of old was a truly magical world for me and the psychic abilities I possess today I believe, while having been born with me, were certainly given their final polish in that, to me, magical fairyland." Rex's description of his early years is one of the best evocations of an Australian pre-television childhood that I have read. However, his school days were often unhappy, as he experienced learning difficulties in some subjects which, in later life, he learned were due to his condition of Asperger's syndrome.

People 'on the spectrum' can often have atypical sensory experiences. Rex claimed to be able to see infrared light. He described seeing, during his childhood, fairy-like or 'elemental entities' in the bush and visions of ancient fleets of ships coming up the river prior to Captain Cook. He vividly described talking to and hugging his grandmother when she came into his room, later finding out that she was deceased at the time. These inexplicable visions gave him a lifelong non-judgemental attitude to the uncanny experiences of other people. Also contributing to the development of Rex's imagination were the stories of his Scottish father Bill (1904-1996) about the 'Loch Ness monster', 'sea serpents' and the 'Abominable Snowman'. Rex's interest in nature was stimulated by visits to the Australian Museum and, from 1954, Mel Ward's 'Gallery of Natural History and Native Art' at the Hydro Majestic hotel in Medlow Bath. Mel gave Rex advice on the preservation and labelling of specimens and the necessity to keep detailed notes of his observations. At the Australian Museum he was awed by the skeletons of extinct giant marsupials and reptiles, the megafauna he spent so much time later writing about.

Rex joined the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales in 1963, and, within a few years, he was giving lectures at their meetings on his research and the breeding of moths and butterflies. He became chairman of the entomological section and curator of the society's insect collection. On 29 May 1965 Rex opened his Mt York Natural History Museum, which already boasted "the largest privately owned insect collection in Australia". While at this Museum, Rex and his father, in front of an audience of 1000 visitors, witnessed the unveiling of the 'Explorers Monument' they had commissioned at Mt York.[4]

A life-changing event for Rex was his first sighting of a Yowie. This occurred at 3:30pm on 7 August 1970 at the Ruined Castle in the Jamison Valley. Thereafter he became obsessed with this creature and collected over 3000 accounts of sightings from the earliest days of Australian settlement. Rex was extremely observant, intensely studying rocks and the ground during his thousands of kilometres of fieldwork on foot. In 1974 he first noticed marks on some rock faces which he began to believe were hieroglyphics of an ancient civilisation that had lived in Australia prior to Aboriginal occupation. He claimed he was able to 'translate' them into English and concluded that they had called themselves the Uru. He found what he interpreted as the remains of megaliths and statues constructed by these people. Other rocks appeared to him to contain the footprints or fossilised remains of, not only Yowies, but other mystery animals. Fresh footprints in soil indicated to him that many species thought to be extinct were still living in the bush.

I first became aware of Rex Gilroy in the 1970s when I visited his Mt York Natural History Museum. However, I did not meet Rex then, as his father Bill was in charge at the time of my visits. The Mt York Museum closed in 1983, but branches had been opened at Katoomba's Scenic Railway (about 1975 to 1977) and the Kedumba Emporium (1977 to 1987). I first met Rex in person in the 1980s when I visited his 'Kedumba Nature Display' at Echo Point.

During the 1980s, and through to the 1990s, Rex, as well as being called the "Yowie Man", also became well known as the "spider man", due to his many press releases in the local paper, mainly about his research on Funnel-web spiders. He asked for donations of live Funnel-web spiders to various collection points throughout the mountains under the "Katoomba Lions Clubs Live Funnel Web Spider Appeal". These were sent to Macquarie University where a vaccine was being developed. The Lions Club published leaflets written by Rex on spider identification and treatment of bites and also lobbied for the vaccine to be available at Katoomba hospital. As the Katoomba Lions Club was by far the main source of spider specimens to the University, it is possible that Rex's enthusiasm for this project saved many lives.

Rex Gilroy always urged the readers of his books to keep an "open mind", however, he himself did not keep an open mind on many political and social topics. Between about 1986 and 1990 he was associated with the group National Action, described as an "extreme right wing" organisation.[5] Rex wrote letters to the local paper supporting

4 'Unveiling of Mt York Monument', *Blue Mountains District News*, 17 December 1969.

5 Wikipedia entry and 'Extreme right wing group finds home in Mountains', *Blue Mountains Gazette*, 14 June 1989, p.24.

some of their aims, but stressed "he did not agree with everything National Action was involved in". He described himself as "a patriotic Australian who wants to keep Australia the way it was." He was particularly concerned with the alleged infiltration of communist teachers into schools.

I contacted Rex in the mid-1990s when I was researching the rare sub-species of butterfly (The Silky Hairstreak, *Pseudalmenus chlorinda chloris*) that had been recorded from Nellies Glen up until the 1960s when a road was constructed down the Glen. Rex willingly shared the information in his notebooks. It was obvious that he was a careful observer and was well aware of the conventional scientific methods of nature study. I incorporated what he told me into a report.[6] Rex also ran the 'Butterfly Farm' at Wilberforce (1984 to 1986) and Butterfly World' at Tamworth (1991 to 2000), after which the Gilroys returned permanently to Katoomba.

Rex Gilroy achieved a significant level of public recognition in 2003 when he was inducted into the 'Eternity Gallery' at the National Museum of Australia. The citation described him: "Known as the father of yowie research, devoting much of his life to bringing this mysterious creature to the public's attention." The display included one of Rex's plaster casts of a Yowie footprint.

I last visited the Gilroys in 2020, which was the last time I saw Rex. In the following year, after having problems with breathing, he was diagnosed with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. This scarring of the lung tissue is caused by breathing fine particles such as coal dust and silica. Rex had used large amounts of naphthalene flakes (this product was also sold in the form of 'moth balls') to preserve his insect and spider specimens. This is now recognised as a carcinogen. Perhaps Rex's disease was caused by exposure to fine naphthalene particles.

A Review of Rex Gilroy's Research

In an interview Rex related some of the inexplicable events of his childhood and said "That's why I'll always listen if someone has an unexplained mystery."[7] Hundreds of people wrote to him with their stories of strange sightings and happenings in their lives. Rex took these observations at face value and included their anecdotes in many of his books.

There is extensive world-wide documentation on sightings of what Rex called Yowies, and the creatures known in other countries as Yetis, Bigfoots, Abominable Snowmen and Sasquatch. These feature prominently in the 'folklore' of indigenous peoples, including Australian Aborigines. However, Rex believed that their existence was real and collected many first-hand sightings in Australia, and poured plaster of Paris into depressions in the ground he believed were Yowie footprints. In 2003 he announced that his skull collection "shows homo erectus evolving into modern humans in Australia well before the arrival of the first Aborigines, and the appearance of modern humans in Africa."[8]

In 1959 the first comprehensive text on what was later known as cryptozoology was published in English. The book *On the Track of Unknown Animals* by Bernard Heuvelmans (1916-2001) brought together a large amount of data on sightings by indigenous peoples and others of animals not known to professional zoologists, including species thought to be extinct. In his own first major survey of the unknown animals of Australasia, *Out of the Dreamtime*, published in 2006, Rex claimed, on the cover of the book, the title of "The Father of Australian Cryptozoology and Yowie Research."

By 1968 Rex had become convinced that there had been many undocumented early voyages to Australia prior to Captain Cook, including visits by Egyptians 2000 years ago. There is a long tradition in European literature of belief in a lost island in the Atlantic Ocean called Atlantis. Rex claimed to have discovered evidence of a Pacific Atlantis and other lost civilisations of the Australian and Pacific regions. One way to interpret the research and publications of Rex Gilroy could be based on his use of chalk. He saw so many interesting rocks, rock formations and markings on rocks that he was bound to discover what looked like, to him, fossilised hominid skulls, rock faces with markings of what looked like texts, and eroded rocks which represented, in his eyes, monoliths, statues and temples created by the peoples of ancient civilisations. Other less imaginative observers would see these as natural formations caused by geological processes. When he saw a rock with markings on it, he defined these with chalk for photographic purposes and interpreted them as messages from the Uru. When he found a boulder about the size and shape of a primate skull he outlined in chalk what to him were facial features.

In my view, the many hundreds of photos in his books showing rocks and boulders marked with chalk are artworks representing Rex Gilroy's unique perceptions, as a 'neurodiverse' person, able to see wavelengths of light not visible to others. Rex Gilroy studied the ground with such intensity that it was inevitable he would see depressions in the soil

6 Jim Smith, 'The Nellies Glen Butterfly' in Integrated Site Design and Jim Smith, *Six Foot Track Conservation and Management Plan*, New South Wales Department of Lands, Orange, 1996, volume 2, pp.40-44.

7 Rod Johnson,' An alien stole my baby', *Good Weekend*, 23 March 1996, p.44.

8 'Yowie man celebrates', *Blue Mountains Gazette*, 24 April 2003.

which to him were the footprints of unknown animals. Pouring plaster of Paris into these, he created intriguing sculptures. Combining his artworks with other evidence and personal anecdotes he created a distinctive form of literature. It is up to each reader to decide whether his books represent groundbreaking original science or science fiction. Rex was often subjected to scorn. He wrote in *Out Of the Dreamtime*:

> I doubt very much that today's crop of investigators would have been able to endure the kind of media ridicule, and outright slanderous character assassination, that I have been forced to endure over the years… not to forget the constant efforts of Australian university academics openly hostile to such investigations, to have me silenced and prevented from publishing my findings.[9]

Personally, I feel that Rex Gilroy's chalk and plaster artworks represent what he saw, through his own unique artistic vision. Few people today, for example, would mock Impressionist, surrealist or abstract painters by saying that their works do not represent reality. Science fiction writers are praised for their abilities to imagine other worlds. No one would make fun of Aboriginal people for their beliefs in a pantheon of creatures weirder than anything that Rex wrote about.

All people are on a spectrum between scepticism and gullibility as to what constitutes 'evidence' for any belief or phenomenon. However, there are dangers in either extreme. A completely open mind could be susceptible to the influence of cults, conspiracy theories and scams. Personally, I keep alive the hope that Thylacines may have, against all odds, survived. However, I am on the sceptical end of the spectrum with regard to the possibility that plesiosaurs and dinosaurs still exist. There are so many thousands of seemingly plausible sightings of 'hairy men' lurking in wild places across the globe, as well as sightings of unidentified flying objects, that there must be some basis for these perceptions. Local artist Tohby Riddle interpreted the persistence of belief in the Yowie:

> As an artist these stories appeal to me. Like Sidney Nolan's Ned Kelly series, they place an incongruous figure in the Australian landscape but one that has roots in old stories and knowledge about that landscape. Depending on the viewer, the figure can be viewed literally, mythologically – or even psychologically, as a kind of bogeyman embodiment of European uneasiness with the Australian bush.[10]

Rex Gilroy's major contribution to Australian popular culture is the dissemination of the word Yowie. Both the Australian National Dictionary and Graham Joyner, a respected analyst of 'hairy man' mythology, agree that this word did not appear in print until 1975 when it was used in interviews and articles by Rex Gilroy.[11] There had been many prior accounts of Australian encounters with hairy hominids, from the earliest days of settlement, but these were usually described as Yahoos, in reference to the descriptions in the book *Gulliver's Travels.* The word Yowie appeared to strike a popular chord in people's imagination and scores of children's books featuring versions of this character were published.

The major commercial use of the Yowie name was by Cadburys who produced a range of Yowie chocolates, with plastic figurines inside, based on ideas developed by Bryce Courtenay and Geoff Pike. These were extraordinarily successful after their release in 1997, with 57 million sold in the first 18 months. The Yowie characters were cute, rather dopey looking, creatures and appeared hairless. Courtenay and Pike wrote a series of books in which various good-natured Yowies save the day after various crises in the "Yowie kingdom".[12] Cadbury claimed the word Yowie was one of its trademarks. Production of the chocolates ceased in 2005 due to a dispute with the creators of the concept. After purchasing the intellectual property in 2012, another company revived production and distributed the chocolates in several major American chains, with annual revenue soaring to $17 million by 2016. The very Australian word Yowie became familiar to millions of Americans. The brand was relaunched in Australia in 2017, and again became very popular, until a major marketing campaign featuring Kinder Surprise eggs seriously cut into the market for novelty chocolates containing plastic toys.[13]

Some might see Rex Gilroy as a modern Don Quixote, a man with an enormous capacity for dreaming and imagination. His 'windmills' were the academics with 'closed minds'. Rex never lost his childhood sense of wonder at the undiscovered possibilities of the world. He became an original artist and storyteller. The Gilroys devoted an extraordinary amount of energy and commitment in trying to share with others the things that they could see.

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9 Rex and Heather Gilroy, *Out Of the Dreamtime. The Search for Australasia's Unknown Animals*, Uru Publications, Katoomba, 2006, pp. 570-1.

10 Tohby Riddle, 'Hinterland', *Blume*, # 1, 2017. p.38.

11 Graham Joyner, 'Scientific, reaction to evidence for the Yahoo or 'Australian Ape', 1882-1912', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, volume 89 (2), 2003, p.176. *Monster, Myth or Lost Marsupial? The Search for the Australian Gorilla in the Jungles of History, Science and Language*, Hayes UK and Thomas, Canberra, 2009, pp.5-10.

12 For example, *Crag the Mangrove Yowie and the Yucky Mukky-Poo Grumkin*, The Five Mile Press, 1997.

13 Patrick Hatch, 'Endangered Yowie at centre of bitter investor squabble', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 July 2019.

The Miners of Katoomba

Review by Robyne Ridge

The Miners of Katoomba, edited and compiled from Roy Smith's Files by Stephen Imrie. Published by Den Fenella Press, 2023.

Anyone interested in the history of Katoomba and its mining origins will find this highly recommended new book an essential addition to their library. It explores in detail the lives of the miners, their families and those associated with them from 1870 until 1904.

The publisher, Jim Smith, gives a brief biography of the author, Roy Smith, in which he explains how the book developed from Roy's initial detailed research to the work of Stephen Imrie in bringing it all together. Jim Smith also describes the life of a miner at the time. He comments on local aboriginal people and reminds the reader that Roy Smith's work predates Trove. Carefully curated maps and photos emphasise the points Jim makes in his introduction. In Roy Smith's own introduction, he indicates he was determined that the unremembered miners would be "recognised for their contribution to our social and economic history."

The main section of the book, "Katoomba Miners (and their business associates) 1870-1904", begins with Robert Palmer Abbot, who was an MLA who advocated for a permanent school for miners' children in Katoomba. Smith then methodically proceeds to examine the lives of around 600 miners, concluding with Joseph Yule, who appeared on the 1893 electoral roll for Nellies Glen. Each of these people has been meticulously researched, and their noteworthy stories preserved for posterity. Some are accompanied by interesting illustrations. The book provides a fascinating and important insight into the live s of the miners and the mining community, such an important part in the founding story of Katoomba and the Upper Blue Mountains.

Copies are available from Megalong Books in Leura. There is also a copy in BMHS Library. Check it out and you will soon realise you need your own copy on your bookshelf.

Excursions 2023

by Robyne Ridge

In the second half of 2023 we were able to re-start our BMHS excursion programme due to the efforts of Christopher Webber. All of us who have enjoyed the trips sincerely thank Chris for his efforts.

We use the community buses, so our trips are limited to 20 people. It's really a pleasant day out with lots of opportunity for learning, chatting and taking photos.

June 2023

On our first excursion in June, we enjoyed a survey of Street Art from Glenbrook up to Katoomba. Glenbrook has a delightful children's story bus stop. Warrimoo is Blinky Bill Country, and the murals reflect that. Springwood is undergoing a visual transformation while Beverly Place in Katoomba is mind-blowing. You need hours or days, with sunlight at different angles, to explore both places. BMCC has created maps of the Springwood and Katoomba street-walks – go to the Hub or the Cultural Centre and ask for one.

It's hard to choose a "best" mural but, for me, it is the subway at Katoomba painted by Vernon Treweeke . I love following the railway line up the Mountains and checking on his interpretation of each village. Every time you look at this mural you see something new. Most of the townships have murals and with time constraints it was not possible to visit all of them. The mural scene under the bridge at Hazelbrook and the 'Jenny Kee' wall at Blackheath are two that should be on people's personal lists of places to visit.

Blinky Bill - Glenbrook

Vernon Treweeke's mural in Katoomba subway

July 2023

On our second excursion, on 19 July, we followed Cox's Road across the Mountains. At Linden, our first stop, it was an eerie feeling to walk in the footsteps of William Cox along his track and look at guttering that was made by him and his men 209 years ago.

Three photos of Coxs Road at Linden

We made a brief diversion down to the Knapsack Bridge to admire its breathtaking beauty. This was not the work of Cox but of John Whitton just over 50 years later. Interesting to see how much more money the government could expend in construction between those fifty years. We tried to follow Cox's Road as much as possible up the Mountain, leaving the Highway for little back roads running beside the railway line.

Macquarie's Monument, in Macquarie St Springwood, a small obelisk marking where Governor Macquarie and his party camped overnight, was a brief stop. After lunch we followed Cox's track from Katoomba to Mt York via Bathurst Road and the Highway, noting that Cox's Road went up and over Pulpit Hill behind the former location of Explorers' Tree. In the early 1820s, William Lawson organised the deviation, now known as Explorers Rd that went round the base of Pulpit Hill.

It was interesting driving through Medlow Bath, looking at the edge of Cox's Road above our heads as workmen were digging bigger holes to widen the current highway. It was an interesting comparison of road works.
At Mt York, Paul Innes gave us a wonderful tour of the site and we walked down the same track that Cox had cut.

August 2023

Phil Hammon describing the sights at the Scenic Railway at Katoomba

Coal mining and its effect on the Blue Mountains was our August excursion. Phil Hammon, of Scenic World and our BMHS President, led this trip to Scenic World and it focused on mining not tourists. We learnt so much about the history of coal mining in the Mountains and Katoomba especially. As we wandered along the board walk it was hard to envisage that the beautiful green foliage all around us was once bare and barren as the miners dug for the valuable black stuff. What they achieved in the 1880s and 1890s in terms of personal endurance was amazing. Riding both the Scenic Railway and the Scenic Cableway was also amazing, as Phil pointed out the piece of the Bleichert tramway that was still hanging down the cliff face! Truly a remarkable day, thanks to Phil's knowledge.

September 2023

Our September excursion was to The Three Hartleys, Hartley Historic Village, Little Hartley and Hartley Vale. Our guide was Ramsay Moodie. His knowledge, which he shared so willingly with us, revealed so much about Hartley and life there in the early years.

St Bernard's church

Inside of Comet Inn

The group outside of Comet Inn

We enjoyed a guided tour of Hartley Historic Site, going inside the Court House and St Bernard's church and listening to the recorded stories there. Ramsay also contributed extra information which added to our visit.

We enjoyed both morning tea and lunch at Hartley Fresh. We can recommend it as a good place to stop if you are exploring the valley or taking a break on a much longer trip. After lunch, we explored Collits Inn. It's now a function centre. It is a lovely spot for a wedding or other celebration and has accommodation for many guests. Such low ceilings inside! Close your eyes and you could imagine the travellers calling in after that precipitous trip down Mt York.

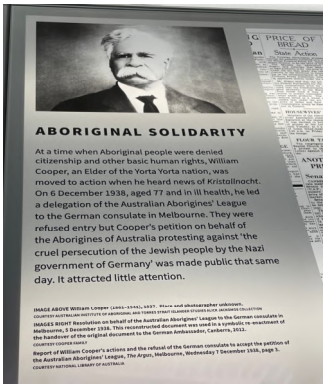
We drove through Hartley Vale, noting the Comet Inn, the old schoolhouse and the site of the cableway up to the railway line. We saw reminders of the shale mining and noted the routes of the old roads, too.

October 2023

Our October 18 Excursion to the Sydney Jewish Museum was a remarkable trip.

Travelling to and from Sydney itself was an adventure as we left the M4 to avoid the tolls, travelling to Kings Cross via Parramatta Rd, Concord Road, Queens Rd, Hawthorne Parade, City West link, the Anzac Bridge and Park and William streets to the Cross. I haven't been on most of those roads for ages. They seemed older and shabbier and there were signs of construction everywhere but Jacarandas were blooming, beautiful spots of purple amongst the old grey buildings. Our driver, Michael, took us for a quick tour of Kings Cross itself. At the Macleay Street end, the trees were beautiful but Darlinghurst Road looked old and shabby.

At the Jewish Museum, our guides were well informed and passionate and this they conveyed to us. The ground floor explored the history of Judaism through time. I especially liked the depiction of George Street a century or so ago and the stories of the early Jewish convicts and settlers, like Barnett Levey who had land grants around Blaxland in the 1820s. The upper floor was dedicated to the Holocaust. This was equally sad and confronting with very human touches, like the beautiful artwork done under such appalling circumstances. Truly, a very moving day!



William Cooper

George Street

Flowers in a vase"

November 2023

On November 15, we explored Capertee and Glen Davis. The buildings from the Hartley Vale mine were moved to Newnes and Glen Davis, so, following our previous visit to Hartley, we were continuing along the shale trail to Glen Davis.

Capertee itself is a village 46 km north of Lithgow. It is on an elevated site above the Capertee Valley. In 2016, the township's population was 145 people. We visited the railway station on the way home and "toured" the town but the pub was closed, so no refreshments. The Capertee Valley itself is a large canyon, reportedly the widest canyon in the

world, wider than the Grand Canyon but not as deep. It is a beautiful valley through which we drove along bumpy narrow roads to reach Glen Davis.

Glen Davis is situated on the Capertee River. It is north of Lithgow and lies just to the east of the Great Dividing Range, as the Capertee River is part of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River system.

Glen Davis was located close to nearby deposits of oil shale and coal. It obviously had disadvantages as a mining centre: its relative remoteness, its relatively low rainfall, and, paradoxically, that the lower part of its site is subject to flooding during heavy rains.

The valley is in the north-eastern corner of the traditional lands of the Wiradjuri, near the boundary with the Darkinjung lands. European settlers colonised and took over land in the valley, beginning in the 1820s, and progressively cleared the land on the valley floor for grazing and European agriculture.

There had been shale-mining attempts in the 19th century, and attempts were made to connect the valley with Newnes (south Newnes in the Wolgan Valley) but it was not until 1938 that mining began seriously at Glen Davis.

The town was established under an Act of the N.S.W. Parliament in December 1939. It was named after George Francis Davis. Glen Davis was the first time that a town in N.S.W. was newly created on town planning principles.

Construction of the Glen Davis Oil Shale Works began in 1938, before the town existed. Early workers lived in tents. This shanty housing became known as 'Bag Town' because the workers used white-washed hessian bagging for housing. Bag Town was across the river from the planned town. There grew three parts to Glen Davis, the planned town of Glen Davis, on the southern side of the river, the 'Bag Town' on the northern side, and a little to the east—between the town centre and the works, on land owned by National Oil Proprietary Limited—an area of staff and employee housing. There was also a planned industrial area to the north-west of the town centre.

The Glen Davis Oil Shale Works first made shale oil in January 1940. The post office for the town opened on 1 March 1939. The school opened in January 1940.

In 1947, Glen Davis had a population of approximately 1,600, who were accommodated as follows: 11 substantial brick houses for staff; a staff hostel made of brick accommodating 30 junior staff; 100 permanent and 50 'war-type' individually owned residences, a group of barracks with accommodation and boarding for 300 single men, a commercial hotel with 25 rooms and a 'Bag Town' of 250 mostly sub-standard dwellings. The school had 260 pupils and 7 teachers. There was a post office, a bank and a police station. The town had a doctor, a pharmacist, three churches, a community centre, golf course, bowling green, children's playground and tennis courts. There were few commercial outlets; two general stores; a pharmacy; a garage; a 'saloon' (a bar separate from the hotel); a barber shop; and the hotel. There was also a motion-picture theatre in the 'Bag Town' section.

The works and the associated shale and coal mines were closed and abandoned, in May 1952, because the works were unprofitable and accumulated losses were approaching the value of the capital and advances involved.

By late 1954, the population which had reached a height of 2000 had fallen to 195, there were 80 empty houses, only three shops were left open -- general merchant, butcher and newsagent -- and the town had lost its doctor, police station and clergymen. The school closed in February 1962. The post office closed on 1 October 1986.

Our tour of what was left of Glen Davis showed a few houses still standing and lots of ruins. It was sad to see the remains of this once-thriving little village.

Ruins of buildings, chimney and retorts at Glen Davis

Our guide then took us to the works. We drove to the entrance and began the walk along the long, straight road with ruins on either side. The purpose of each of the buildings was explained to us. A set of shipping containers looked newer than other ruins and indeed they were as the area had been used as a film set for “SAS” and “Home and Away”. Being encircled by these man-made structures was breathtaking. You are enclosed by crumbling buildings while the magnificent cliffs crowd in around you: nature versus man and nature is winning.

December 2023

Our final excursion for 2023 was to be Sofala and Hill End and was planned for Wednesday 6 December. However, there were problems with the bus booking and the trip was postponed.

Special thanks go to Christopher Webber for all his hard work in organising these trips for our members.

Editorially Speaking

As I write this, six days before Christmas, it is hot, at least 30C, and for Blackheath that is very hot. On such days I pity the poor souls down in Sydney. Even if they do have air conditioning, it keeps them indoors and they cannot enjoy the outside world.

Even though Christmas is almost upon us I have already received a lot of text and photos for the next issue of *Hobby's Outreach*. Thank you everyone for your contributions over the past six months or so.

For those of you that get a hardcopy (ie. printed copy) version of *Hobby's Outreach*, we are looking into the possibility of adding colour and thus bringing it more into line with the electronic version. There are various combinations and permutations that are possible. However, it's early days yet, so keep your eye on this column for the latest developments.

Thirty Years Ago

Walk in Govett's Leap Road area, Blackheath February 1994[1]

"We were blessed with pleasant weather for our February walk to see first some of the old business premises and cottages in the nearer section of Govett's Leap Road (originally known as "Govett Street"). The famous Glenella Guesthouse, and the Uniting (once Methodist) Church remain very much as they were erected years ago. We saw the site of the Old Ivanhoe Hotel; quite a large establishment built in 1889 and burned down in the 1930s. It was replaced by the present Ivanhoe Hotel down on the highway.

Further along the road we noted the site of the first Chinese market garden in Blackheath, and the drain channeling its water supply - a small stream which ran down from springs at the bottom of Leichardt Street and serviced not only the garden, but an early cordial factory, and the other businesses and homes in the vicinity.

After crossing Prince Edward Street we came to "Boscobel", built as the home of Canon Boyce, after whom Mt Boyce was named. He was famous for the fact that he was responsible for the introduction of the Old Age Pension in Australia. Not far along from "Boscobel" we came to the very extensive property first developed (as were most of the items we had inspected) in the 1880s, as the country home of Mr. John Pope, the founder of Farmers Emporium in Sydney. This grand estate was named "Karra Weera", and, as well as a very large house, included its own private golf course and tennis courts, and great areas of gardens (some later re-designed by Paul Sorensen). About 1947 the house was much altered, re-named "Parklands", and used as a guesthouse until the 1960s, when, like so many others, it was burned down.

We proceeded along to Cleopatra Street, and noted the large two-storeyed home named "Balquain", which has had some interesting owners, as well as providing a holiday home for Presbyterian clergy for a time. It stands on land once part of the grounds of a most interesting property, re-named in recent years "Cleopatra," when it was developed as a select restaurant and guest house. The first owner of this, total 34 acres of land, was George Evans, a Sydney solicitor, who, early in the 1880s, built his fine country home named "Eirene" (the Greek word for "peace"). It also was quite an extensive estate, with its own tennis court, and a number of outbuildings - one quite large, built as a playroom and gymnasium for use of his children in wet weather. Later owners, including William Hargreaves, before he moved to Medlow used that room as a library, and it also served as a ballroom on occasions. In 1904 the property was sold to Alderman Massey Harris, who served as Mayor of Sydney for a term or two. He changed the name from "Eirene" to "Mamyong", which it remained until sold to the present owners by his family.

We were delighted to be allowed to inspect "Cleopatra" and its grounds, where beautiful old trees were very much admired. A full description of the rooms, outhouses and amenities of "Eirene" in the early days, were read from our files, and we attempted to imagine the home as lived in by Mr. Evans, whose relatives included a variety of famous people - ranging from convicts to members of the English aristocracy.

After a picnic lunch at Govett's Leap, where we viewed the results of the recent bushfires in the valley, we concluded our outing by watching a video of the fires throughout the Mountains shown at the nearby National Parks & Wildlife Centre".

1 Anon (1994). 'Walk in Govett's Leap Road area, Blackheath, February 1994', *Hobby's Outreach*, Vol. 5, No. 5, p. 5.

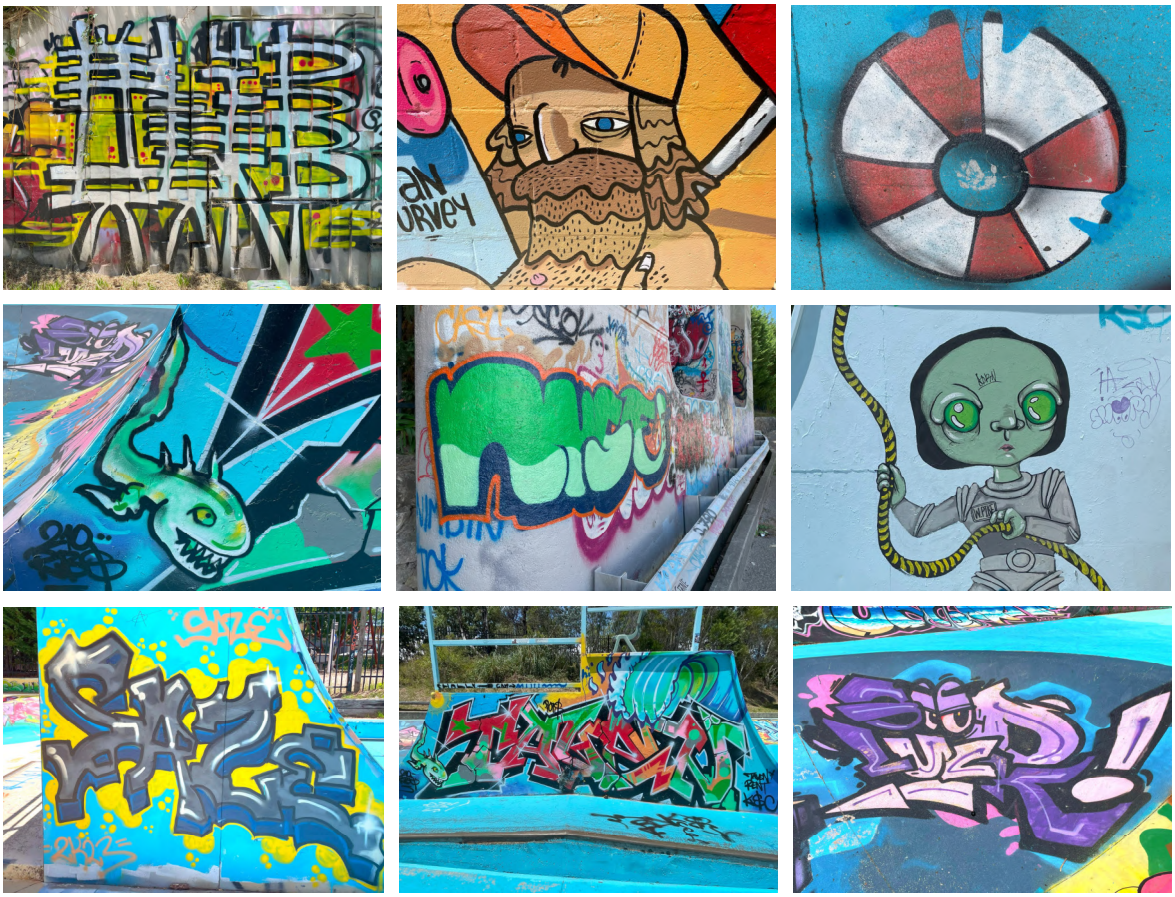
Art Works at Katoomba Skate Park and Beverly Place

by Erik Halbert

> The Street Art Walk is a dynamic, community-driven cultural treasure of the Blue Mountains, created by Street Art Murals Australia (SAMA) in partnership with the Blue Mountains Cultural Centre, University of Western Sydney and relevant stakeholders in the Beverly Place precinct. The Street Art Walk displays world standard street art from all aerosol disciplines. International, national and local artists of varying experience paint large-scale art works in this precinct through a curated process of proposal and selection. Stylistically the murals cover all street artistic disciplines and are temporary by nature.[1]

BMHS had an excursion in June 2023 which visited Street Art from Glenbrook to Katoomba. Robyne Ridge's report, in this issue, covers the highlights of this visit.[2] However, due to time and space constraints some places were not, or only briefly, reported. In Katoomba only Beverly Place and Katoomba subway were mentioned, with only the latter being illustrated. Other locations such as Katoomba Skate Park and Froma Lane and were not visited. The present note shows images from Katoomba Skate Park and Beverly Place in some detail.[3]

Katoomba Skate Park Art Work



Katoomba Skate Park lies at the northern end of Goldsmith Place past Gearin's Hotel and Katoomba Railway Station. It is easily accessed by car from the Great Western Highway and by foot from Katoomba subway. There are extensive art works all over the skate ramps themselves as well as on adjacent walls. By their nature the displays are temporary and the nine photos above show the styles on display on 12 December 2023.

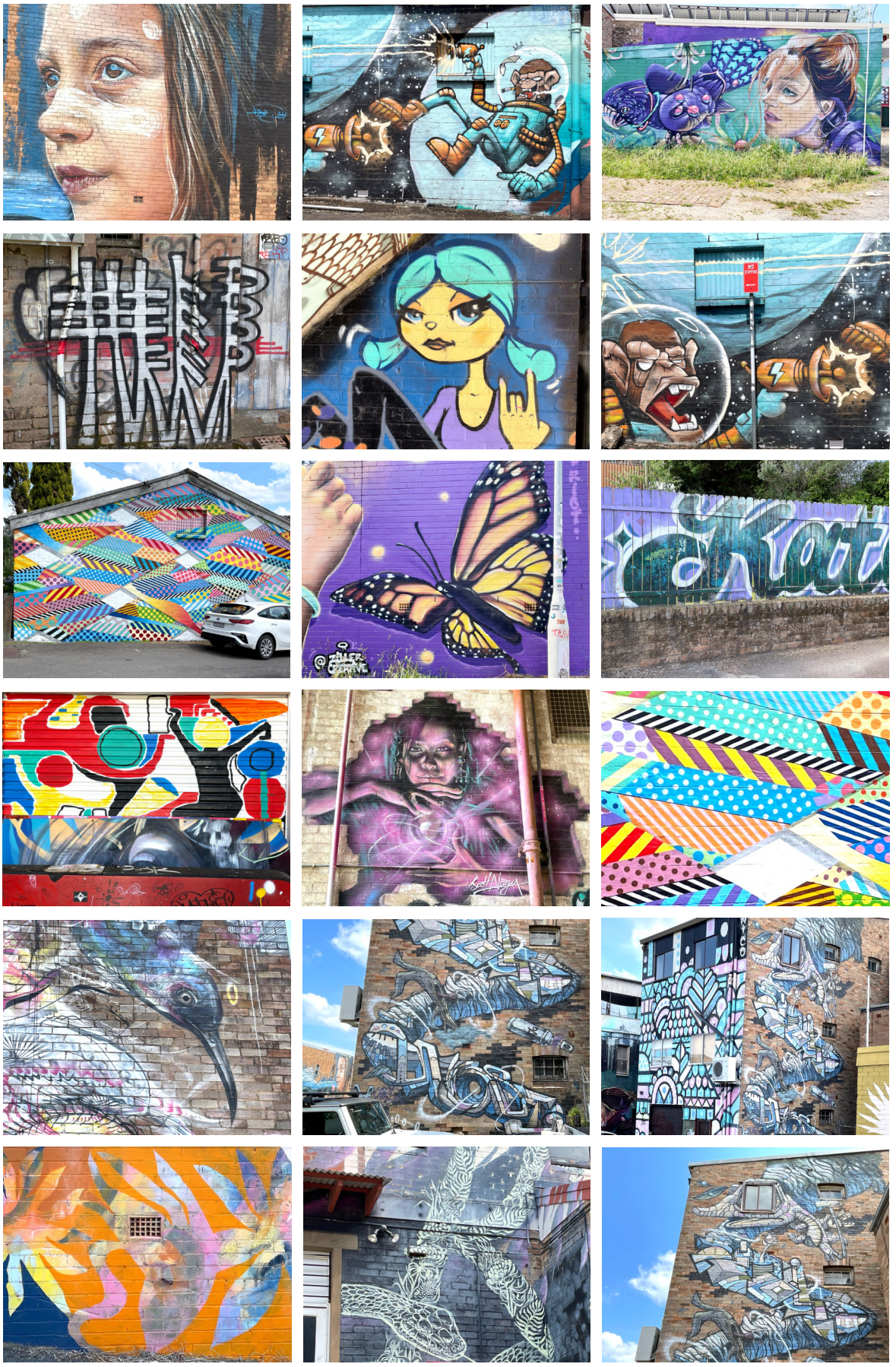
Beverly Place is a backstreet in Katoomba, lying between Lurline and Waratah Streets. Due to space limits, Robyne's report had to be content with "Beverly Place in Katoomba is mind-blowing." It certainly is! The site is officially sanctioned and community-driven. There are 32 individual art sites and the art on display changes due to accessibility (some sites are three stories high!) and lack, or otherwise, of objects such as drainpipes, fences and bins.

1 Anon. 'Street Art Walk', <ttps://myst.com.au/street-art-walk/>,viewed 14 December 2023.

2 Ridge, Robyne (2023) 'Excursions – 2023' Hobby's Outreach, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 5-8.

3 All photos are by Erik Halbert and have been cropped and digitally enhanced where appropriate.

Beverly Place Art Work



NOTE: Street art is by its nature ephemeral: ‘what is here today, is possibly gone tomorrow.’

Calendar of Events

Month/Day	Date	Event
February		
Saturday	3	**Meeting and Public Talk**. Commences at 10.30. Tall Stories by Michael Duffy. 'A lively history of the Blue Mountains.' The first meeting and public talk for 2024 will take place on Saturday 3 February commencing at 10.30am.This talk will be based on Michael's recently published and very well received book and Michael will lead us through the "true" and "not so true" stories of the Blue Mountains. Don't miss it!
Thursday	8	**Excursion.** 'The Katoomba Story Walking Tour.' Meet at Old Gearin Hotel, 273 Great Western Highway, Katoomba at 9.50 am for 10.00 departure. Free parking in Railway commuter carpark. Contact Sue Collins 0410 0600 224 or Sue@mountaintales.com. The Society's first outing for 2024. It will be led by Sue Collins, who conducts tours under the name "Mountains Tales". We will meet at the Old Gearin Hotel (273 Great Western Highway, Katoomba) at 9.50 am for a 10.00 am departure. There is free parking in the Railway commuter carpark. This is a social gathering for society members, partners and friends. There is a 1.5 km walk involved, over the two hours, walking on council footpaths, stopping every 100 metres for a chat. Our tour ends at the Carrington Hotel where we will enjoy a Devonshire Tea. The cost is $44.00, cash or EFTPOS. Minimum number, 12 guests. Maximum number, 20 guests.
Friday	16	BMHS Management Committee Meeting.
Wednesday	21	**Excursion.** 'Powering Blue Mountains.' Tour Guide is Paul Innes. Cost is $25 plus lunch. Contact Chris Webber on 0424 720 676 or vakarr@yahoo.com. Max. number guests 20. Travel to the Carrington Hotel power station, powerhouse North Katoomba, Mt Piper power station, Hampton Hotel, Hampton Wind turbines. The Mt Piper tour is one hour involving a few steps and going downwards only. There is a lift to ascend. People who may find this difficult can stay in the visitors centre.
Saturday	24	Hobby's Reach Garden Working Bee. 10.00 am.
Sunday	25	Tarella Cottage Historical Museum Open Day. 10.00 am to 3.00 pm.
March		
Saturday	2	**Meeting and Public Talk.** 'The McLaughlin Address' at Wentworth Falls School of Arts. Tanya Evans, Director of Applied History - Macquarie University. 'Family, Community and Nation: Understanding Identity through the History and Heritage of the Blue Mountains of Australia'.
Friday	15	BMHS Management Committee Meeting.
Wednesday	20	**Excursion.** 'Lower Blue Mountains Railways'.
Saturday	30	Hobby's Reach Garden Working Bee. 10.00 am.
Sunday	31	Tarella Cottage Historical Museum Open Day. 10.00 am to 3.00 pm.
April		
Saturday	6	**Meeting and Public Talk.** by Kelsey McMorrow. 'John Tebbit and his instruments, legacy'.
Wednesday	17	**Excursion.** 'Upper Blue Mountains Railways'.
Saturday	27	Hobby's Reach Garden Working Bee. 10.00 am.
Sunday	28	Tarella Cottage Historical Museum Open Day. 10.00 am to 3.00 pm.
May		
Saturday	4	**Meeting and Public Talk.** Reschedule of Nov 2023 talk 'The Tasman Map' by Ian Burnett.
Wednesday	15	**Excursion.** 'Blue Mountains Historic Houses'.
Saturday	25	Hobby's Reach Garden Working Bee. 10.00 am.
Sunday	26	Tarella Cottage Historical Museum Open Day. 10.00 am to 3.00 pm.
June		
Saturday	1	**Meeting and Public Talk.** by Peter Doyle on 'Forensic and Photographic Archive, Justice and Police Museum'.
Wednesday	19	**Excursion.** 'Cabramatta Temple Crawl'
Saturday	29	Hobby's Reach Garden Working Bee. 10.00 am.
Sunday	30	Tarella Cottage Historical Museum Open Day. 10.00 am to 3.00 pm.

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Who Am I? (4)

The answer will be found on the bottom of the address page.

BMHS Executive

President: Philip Hammon (0414 822 699)
Sr Vice-President: Ross Ingram (0400 356 824)
Vice-President: Robyne Ridge (0419 985 546)
Minutes Secretary: Fiona Burn (0418 620 264)
Correspondence Secretary: Ross Ingram

Committee Members

Stephen Davis (0434 437 204)
Erik Halbert (0405 828 556)
John Hill (0474 463 854)
Michael Mahoney (0478 096 684)

Other Responsibilities

Building Maintenance: Ross Ingram
Chair, Archives Working Group: Fiona Burn
Grounds: Ross Ingram, Stephen Davis
HN Editor: Stephen Davis + E. Halbert + R. Ridge
Hobby's Outreach Editor: erik.halbert@gmail.com
Erik Halbert (0405 828 556)
Librarian: Sherida Currie (0418 820 906)
Membership: Edward Ridge (0428 629 306)
Photography: Ted Szafraniec (02) 4753 6374
Publications: Erik Halbert
Publicity/Catering: Robyne Ridge
Research: Robyne Ridge + Stephen Davis
Tarella Curator: Vacant

Please Note Closing Date

CLOSING DATE FOR ARTICLES FOR THE APRIL 2024-MAY 2024 ISSUE OF *HOBBY'S OUTREACH* IS

WEDNESDAY 13 MARCH

If you are thinking about contributing an article please advise me as early as possible. This will help with planning each issue. Ask also for a copy of the Guidelines for Contributors. It is not necessary to try and format your contribution. Give me your text and photos and I will take it from there.

A Request: - A Bequest

PLEASE REMEMBER BMHS IN YOUR WILL

You may like to consider leaving a bequest to the Society. If so, the Law Society of NSW recommends the following wording:

I bequeath the sum of $..... to the Blue Mountains Historical Society Inc for its general purposes and declare that the receipt issued by the treasurer of the time being of the Blue Mountains Historical Society shall be complete discharge to my executors in respect of any sum paid to the Society.

A Thought

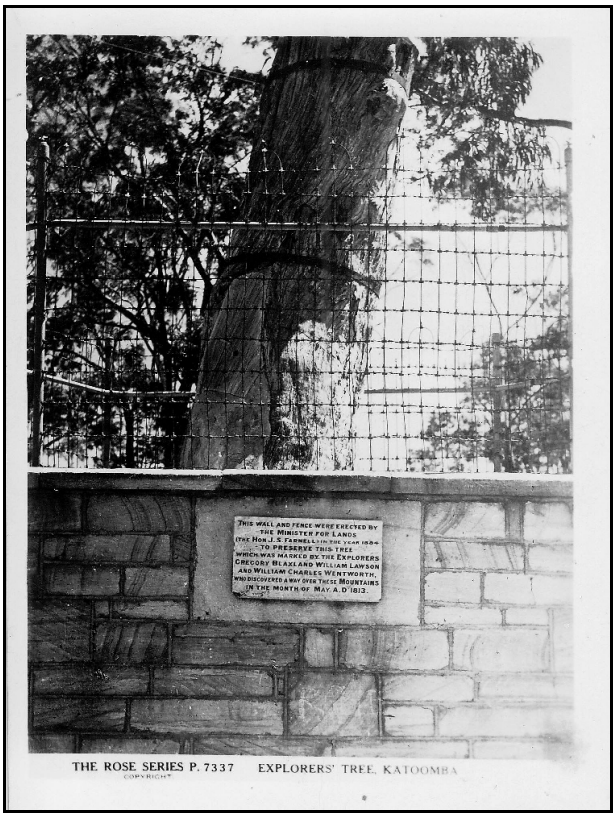
Looking back through years of *Hobby's Outreach* I am continually amazed at the facts that people unearth; the photos that get shown, the questions that get aired, the isolated letters, pieces of poetry, identity questions and the like. One thing leads to another and what finally comes out is fascinating history. Start with a query and you may end with an absorbing story. **HO WANTS THAT STORY.**

IMAGES FROM THE BMHS PHOTOGRAPHS COLLECTIONS

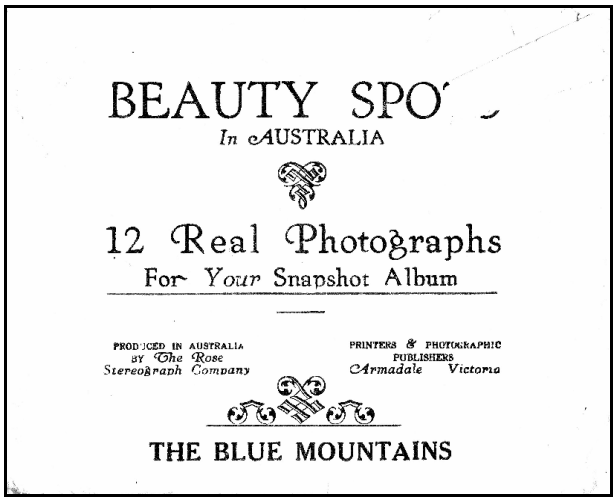
by Ted Szafraniec

Number 11 in a series featuring photos from the extensive photo collection held by BMHS

Title: Beauty Spots in Australia: THE BLUE MOUNTAINS
Photographer: The Rose Stereograph Company, Armidale, Victoria Australia
Date range: 1912 - 1942
Donor: Coral Ewen, Leura (1997)
Photographs: Packet of 12 B&W snapshot real photographs (various sizes from 6.4 x 8.8 cm to 8.9 x 6.9 cm) in their Envelope (8.8 x 10.5 cm).



Real photo of Explorers' Tree Katoomba Rose Series P7337.



"The Blue Mountains" series souvenir "Real Photo" packet from which the above photo comes.

The illustrations shown are from a packet of 12 small images ("The Blue Mountains" series) with the photo selected being Explorers' Tree Katoomba, Rose Series P7337 (8.9 x 6.7 cm) from the BMHS Collection (BMHS531). This image is derived from a Rose postcard probably taken between the 1930s and 1940s by the Rose Stereograph Company. It is also one of a number taken of the Explorer's Tree in Katoomba by George Rose over the lifetime of the company. George Rose died in 1942 and the Cutts family took over the business. There is a variety of images in the packet and most are reproduced resized Rose postcards but a couple appears to have been specifically produced for this set and are not typical Rose postcards.

These types of B&W snapshot real photos packets were commonly produced of tourist scenes, towns and resorts throughout Australia between 1912 and the 1950s. They can be found in packets of 6, 8, 10 and 12 photos and were mostly produced in monochrome. In Australia most postcard companies and many local souvenir outlets produced them. It is unknown whether this format was solely an Australian practice as few overseas versions have been seen although some small packets of views of Cairo during the First World War brought back by Australian servicemen have been seen in this format. However as the international company Valentines also produced these formats in Australia it is likely that they were also produced in Europe and England too.

The packet's sub-title 'real photographs' is interesting and also a bit confusing since most photographs are essentially real photo images produced using a variety of different media and processes. So why use the term "real"? Well most of these images were produced as souvenirs for the tourist market to be placed in personal photo albums. The term "real" is not used in photography (for obvious reasons) but probably comes from the "Real Photograph" postcard period that became popular worldwide from around 1910 and still continues today. In Australia, George Rose from Melbourne, pioneered the B&W practice of the "Real Photograph" postcard in around 1904 when most postcards were still produced photomechanically (but often from photographic images).

The other interesting term used is 'snapshot album'. 'Snapshot' usually means photos produced by amateur photographers and originated around the 1890s when Kodak produced commercial cameras and film to be used by the general public and later when albums became a common means of displaying personal snapshots. Early films and cameras such as the Kodak Vest Pocket (1912-37) produced small prints (on 127 roll film) and professional photos like the Rose "Real Photos" ended up in personal 'snapshot albums'.

The 'Explorers Tree' image is topical because the Blue Mountains City Council controversially removed the tree monument in February 2021 as it became a traffic hazard. The wall and fence around the monument seems to have been officially conceived in 1884 (see plaque on photo) and over the years there has been a lot of mythology and discussion surrounding it. The removal of the Explorers Tree monument will now surely become part of this mythology.

References

Ron Blum (2011). *George Rose, The Postcard Era*. Oaklands Park, SA: Self published.
Mary Warner Marien (2012). *100 Ideas that Changed Photography*. London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd.
Martyn Jolly. *Delicious Moments: The Photograph Album in Nineteenth-Century Australia*. In Judy Annear (Ed.) (2015). *The Photograph and Australia*. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales. pp. 234-259.

Membership Report

by Edward Ridge

New Members

We would like to welcome the following new members to the society: Robyn Short, Jason Dorrington and Joseph Moore. The Society is pleased to welcome new members to the society. We thank them for their support of the Blue Mountains Historical Society.

Membership Report for December-January

The Blue Mountains Historical Society had, at the end of the 2023 calendar year, 164 financial members including both individual and family members.

We are keen to see an increase in these numbers to pre-Covid19 levels and would ask members and friends of the Society to encourage their friends and acquaintances to join the Society.

There is a reduced fee of $15 for new members who join between January and March. This covers the period to the end of June 2024, the end of the membership year, when a full year's membership comes due.

You can keep up to date with the Society's events for 2024 by checking the Events section under the "What's On" menu on the Society's website.

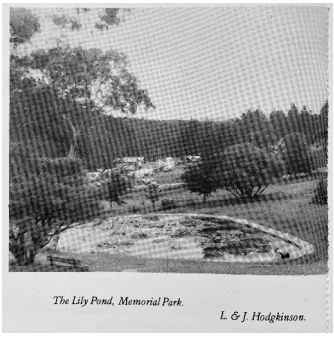
Availability of New Member and Member Renewal Forms

Anyone interested in joining the Blue Mountains Historical Society can now download the Membership Application from the Membership Section of the Society's website at www.bluemountainshistory.com.

Instructions on how to complete your application and pay for it are outlined on the form. If you are able to scan the form and email it to the Society on bmhs@bluemountainshistory.com that would be helpful. Otherwise, just sending an ordinary email with your responses to the information asked on the form would be fine.

The most convenient way to pay for membership without coming into the Society is via Electronic Funds Transfer. The Society's details are on the membership form. Please remember to include your name and either the letters "NM" or the words "New Member" so that we know you have paid and add you to our list of members. However, we'd be really pleased to meet new members if you'd like to call in on Tuesdays or Fridays between 10am and 2pm or on any Open Day, which is the last Sunday of each month, other than December, and join in person.

Have you seen the Lily Pond?



This photo of the Lily Pond in the Memorial Garden in Blackheath is the only one known, at present, by the editor. It is undated and appears in *Historic Blackheath* produced by The Rotary Club of Blackheath 1975:1976, Joseph Bennett & Son, Katoomba, p. 270. There is no reference to the photo in the surrounding text, or in the rest of the book.

If anyone has another photo, text or map reference to the Lily Pond or knows the location for the one shown then please contact the editor. The general surroundings are consistent with it having been in the area now occupied by the Duck Pond but I would love to have some supporting evidence.

BLUE MOUNTAINS HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.
Hobby's Reach Research Centre
99 Blaxland Road, Wentworth Falls NSW
Phone 02 4757 3824
PO Box 17, Wentworth Falls 2782
Open Tuesday and Friday 10am-2pm for members and public

Website: www.bluemountainshistory.com

Email: bmhs@bluemountainshistory.com

MONTHLY MEETINGS
With Guest Speakers

are held at Hobby's Reach
On the first Saturday of each month
(unless otherwise noted)
Morning tea 10am
Meetings start at 10.30am

Visitors welcome

Blue Mountains Historical Society Inc.
PO Box 17, Wentworth Falls NSW 2782

Who am I? No. 4. Answer: William Romaine Govett (1807-1848). Surveyor. Portrait Painting 1843: **Image:** from the State Library of NSW. **Statue:** Blackheath. **Mural snippet:** Blackheath railway station.